



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the 2018
Regional Telecommunications Independent
Committee report:**

**2018 Regional Telecommunications Review: Getting
it right out there.**

20 March 2019

[This page is left intentionally blank.]

Contents

Message from Minister McKenzie	1
Overview.....	2
Australian Government response	3
Access to telecommunications infrastructure—Recommendation 2	3
Recommendation 2	3
Working with NBN Co—Recommendations 1, 6 and 7	5
Recommendation 1a.....	6
Recommendation 1b	6
Recommendation 1c.....	6
Recommendation 6a.....	7
Transparency of NBN fixed wireless performance.....	7
Transparency of NBN satellite performance	8
Recommendation 6b	8
Recommendation 7	9
Modern and appropriate consumer protections—Recommendations 3, 4 and 5.....	9
Recommendation 3	10
Recommendation 4	10
Recommendation 5	10
Digital inclusion—Recommendations 8, 9 and 10	11
Recommendation 8	11
Recommendation 9	11
Recommendation 10c.....	12

Message from Minister McKenzie

Access to 21st century communications is more important than ever before, particularly for people living and working in the bush.

Reliable telecommunications services can mean the difference between being able to use quality telehealth services locally and having to drive hundreds of kilometres to a capital city for treatment.

In emergency situations, strong communication links can be life-saving. Reliable mobile coverage and landlines are vital in making sure Australians can contact the services they need in times of emergency and natural disaster. For farmers, digital connectivity can improve productivity and regional tourism operators can reach new markets, realising the potential of their businesses.

Of course, in a country the size of Australia, connectivity comes with unique challenges. Connecting every home and business is no small feat. That's why I am proud to be part of a Government that is making connectivity a priority for our regions. This Government has a strong track record of investing in regional communications, and this is something we will continue into the future.

We have invested significantly in regional telecommunications infrastructure through the Mobile Black Spot Program and prioritising the regional rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN). We are listening to the people living and working in our regions. One of the many ways we are doing this is through the regular independent review of telecommunications services.

The 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review (the Edwards Review) has helped our Government better understand the benefits and barriers of living in the bush, and conducting business outside the major cities. The review importantly provides regional Australians and communities a real chance to speak up about the telecommunications issues affecting them.

The Edwards Review is the result of months of research and extensive public consultation by the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (the committee). The committee held 22 public face-to-face consultations across regional Australia, and received more than 380 submissions from members of the public and key groups representing regional Australians. I would like to thank the committee, chaired by Mr Sean Edwards, assisted by Ms Wendy Duncan, Ms Johanna Plante, Ms Robbie Sefton, Ms Kylie Stretton and Mr Paul Weller.

I would like to thank all the people who gave their time to contribute to the review. Some travelled hundreds of kilometres to share their experiences with the committee and pave the way for better telecommunications services across Australia. Hundreds of people wrote well-researched submissions that have helped inform the Government about how best to invest in communications and ensure the whole country is digitally connected now and into the future.

I am proud to be the Minister for Regional Services in a government that takes these matters seriously. Our response to the review will ensure regional, rural and remote Australians have the connectivity they need to maximise their economic, social and public safety benefits.

Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie
Minister for Regional Services, Sport, Local Government and Decentralisation

Overview

The 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review examined how people use telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia and how regional communities can maximise the economic, social and future opportunities enabled by digital technologies and services.

The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (the committee) was comprised of Mr Sean Edwards (Chair), Ms Wendy Duncan, Ms Johanna Plante, Ms Robbie Sefton, Ms Kylie Stretton and Mr Paul Weller. The committee consulted extensively. They hosted 22 public face-to-face consultations across regional Australia and received over 380 submissions from members of the public and key groups representing regional Australians.

The committee received more than 380 submissions to the issues paper. The committee delivered its report, 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review: Getting it right out there (the report), to Government on 30 September 2018. The report puts forward 10 recommendations for improving telecommunications in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Minister for Regional Services, Sport, Local Government and Decentralisation, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, tabled the report and a Ministerial Statement in Parliament on 4 December 2018.

The report sets out that in order to maximise economic and social benefits for regional, rural and remote communities through the use of digital technologies, the following enablers need to be in place:

- access to telecommunications infrastructure
- modern and appropriate consumer protections
- digital inclusion of regional, remote and rural Australians

The report makes a compelling case of the benefits of increased digital connectivity for the regions. Economic modelling from the Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture project indicates that digital agriculture could increase the gross value of Australian agricultural production by \$20.3 billion, a 25% increase over 2014-15 levels. The greatest gains are expected to come from remote monitoring, automation, better tailoring of inputs such as fertiliser and seed, and environmental benefits such as efficiencies in water and pest management.

Tourism in regional Australia is another growth area. Submissions to the review emphasise that connectivity can drive increased tourism. Visitors to the regions have increased on average by 4.1% per annum over the past five years. Research from Tourism Australia shows that 289 million visitor nights were spent in regional Australia in 2017, up from 234 million in 2012. The report includes first-hand examples from regional tourism operators on the challenges they have faced and how technologies have or could improve their businesses.

Australian Government response

This Liberal National Government has a strong track-record of investing in regional communications, and this is something we will continue into the future. The Government's \$5.5 billion investment in NBN Co's satellite and fixed wireless networks is helping to close the digital divide. We have invested significantly in regional telecommunications infrastructure, committing \$220 million to the first four rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program and prioritising the regional rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN).

The regional rollout of the NBN is almost complete with more than 98% of premises in regional Australia able to access the network or have construction underway, with Tasmania and the Northern Territory the first jurisdictions set to be completed. 70% of premises in regional Australia will be serviced by fixed-line broadband, and by 2022, the Government will have invested over \$3.55 billion to provide fixed wireless services across rural and regional Australia, including ongoing upgrades to ensure that services meet the needs of consumers. Around \$2 billion has been spent on delivering satellite services to the most difficult-to-serve premises.

The report highlights that expanding mobile coverage has clear economic and social benefits, as well as public safety benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote areas of Australia. While mobile network operators collectively claim to provide coverage to over 99% of Australia's population, this only equates to around 30% of Australia's landmass.

The Government's Mobile Black Spot Program is helping to address this. The program has been highly successful, with the Government directly investing \$220 million and to date has leveraged a total of more than \$680 million in new investment for mobile infrastructure across Australia. While there are parts of the country where it may not be viable for the mobile network operators to provide coverage, even with Government support, there are opportunities to extend mobile coverage to more areas of regional, rural and remote Australia through further rounds of the program.

Our strong track record of investment in regional communications gives the Government a solid base from which to expand on to respond to the three priority areas identified in the committee's report.

The Government's responses to the individual recommendations, grouped by theme, are detailed below.

Access to telecommunications infrastructure—Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2: The Government commits to a large scale, multi-year Stronger Regional Connectivity Package to improve broadband and mobile services in areas of high economic, social and public safety significance, particularly in areas served predominantly by the Sky Muster satellite service. Investment to be guided by a strategic place-based approach.

Recommendation 2

The Government agrees with the committee's recommendation that a large-scale, multi-year Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package will further improve access to and use of broadband and mobile services in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Notwithstanding the significant investments that the Government has made in regional telecommunications services, there is more that can be done. The unprecedented demand for data is placing pressure on some parts of the NBN and mobile carriers' regional networks. With the regional rollout of the NBN almost complete, future telecommunications investments will be targeted to complement the NBN.

The Government has committed new funding of \$220 million to a large-scale, multi-year Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package to improve broadband and mobile services in areas of high economic, social and public safety significance. This package will include two further rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, and a new broader Regional Connectivity Program that uses a place-based approach to target investment to provide economic opportunities and allow full participation in the digital economy for regional communities and businesses.

The Government has committed \$160 million to two additional rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program. As we have proven with the first four rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, expanding mobile coverage has clear economic and social benefits, as well as public safety benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote areas of the country. We have partnered with the mobile network operators, state governments, and local communities to deliver 1047 new base stations. From Darnley Island in the Torres Strait to Eggs and Bacon Bay in southern Tasmania, communities right across regional Australia are benefitting from improved mobile coverage through this highly successful program. There are opportunities to extend mobile coverage through further rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program and to continue delivering economic, social and public safety benefits to Australians in regional, rural and remote areas.

The new \$60 million Regional Connectivity Program will take a place-based approach to targeting investment, based on local priorities, and complementing the Government's investments in the NBN and Mobile Black Spot Program. The program will target areas:

- of high economic, public safety or social value
- outside the NBN fixed line footprint and are predominantly serviced by the Sky Muster satellite service, and
- where the provision of better connectivity and increased data have a clear benefit to a local region

Through this new initiative, the Government will deliver additional investment to maximise the economic opportunities and region-wide benefits for regional, rural and remote Australians.

With the growth in demand for data and the movement of essential government and industry services online, the timing for this new investment is now. All levels of government can get the best outcomes for regional, rural and remote Australians by working together to fill the gaps in access to telecommunications infrastructure and invest in the potential of regional economies. If we do nothing then the productivity improvements and economy-wide benefits that could be gained will be foregone and the 'digital divide' in regional Australia will grow.

Working with NBN Co—Recommendations 1, 6 and 7

Recommendation 1: To give effect to NBN Co’s stated commitments to upgrading its network, we recommend that:

- a) The company establish clear criteria to provide transparency about planned future technology upgrades and indicative timings of these upgrades in regional, rural and remote areas. We suggest that future technology upgrades initially focus on high value agricultural areas, business precincts, public interest premises, and the regional tourism sector.
- b) The Government require NBN Co to adjust the area switch element of its Technology Choice Program so that it can be a financial co-contributor with other interested parties.
- c) NBN Co should assign responsibility for improving and upgrading the fixed-wireless and satellite networks to an experienced member of the company’s senior executive management team. In addition, at least one member of the Board of Directors should have relevant skills and experience in regional, rural and remote issues.

Recommendation 6: The committee recommends:

- a) Independent measuring of the performance of fixed-wireless and satellite NBN services in regional areas to better understand where problems may lie in the supply chain that negatively impact on end-users.
- b) Truth in advertising and reporting about the quality of services consumers will receive during peak times

Recommendation 7: The existing data limits for Sky Muster services be reviewed with the aim of increasing data limits across the board. As a minimum, the spot beams that are underutilised should have data limits increased.

The Government notes that recommendations 1, 6 and 7 are primarily directed at NBN Co.

NBN Co is a Government Business Enterprise, and as such, is responsible for making its own business decisions. NBN Co has a key role in terms of implementing Government policy in relation to telecommunications services for rural and regional communities. This policy is set out in a Statement of Expectations which includes making network rollout in underserved areas a priority. While NBN Co has a responsibility to make fast broadband access available to all Australians, as the review demonstrates, there are particular challenges to overcome in delivering services in rural and remote locations.

NBN Co has been highly engaged with the Regional Telecommunications Review, including attending all 22 public consultations around the country to provide local and operational information.

The Government and NBN Co will work together to improve the experience of the NBN for all Australians, noting that NBN Co’s priority task is to complete the network rollout by 2020.

Recommendation 1a

During the construction phase of the network NBN Co's selection of technology in an area is based on an assessment of the cost per premises using the most cost effective technology for a given location. This is consistent with the Statement of Expectations requirement to roll out the network as quickly as possible at least cost to taxpayers. NBN Co advises via its website (NBNco.com.au) the planned technology for a premises based on an individual address check. There are only a small number of locations that are still in the design process, and the remainder are in different phases of construction. NBN Co has processes in place to identify locations still within design or early stages of construction where it makes sense to switch to a fixed technology. When these changes are made NBN Co's online coverage maps will be updated to reflect the change.

NBN Co also continuously reviews demand growth and its impact on performance in all parts of the network. For example, in September 2018 the company began upgrading capacity on its 60,000 km fibre optic backbone. This includes upgrades such as the link between Darwin and Brisbane which supports capacity growth on the Sky Muster network. The company has also committed an additional \$800 million to managing capacity and performance on the fixed wireless network over the next four years. NBN Co notifies retail service providers when these upgrades are to be undertaken so that they may inform their customers and therefore minimise disruption. In the interests of ensuring even greater transparency the NBN Co local community engagement team has commenced community outreach where upgrade work is likely to temporarily impact network performance.

Once the rollout is complete, NBN Co has committed to work with the Government to develop clear criteria for how and where future upgrades could be implemented.

Recommendation 1b

NBN Co's Technology Choice Program allows individuals or entities representing whole areas to invest in a different access technology from the planned technology. NBN Co requires that applicants under the Technology Choice program meet the incremental cost between the technology that was to be rolled out and the new technology that has been chosen by the applicant. NBN Co has and continues to make changes to the program to provide additional technology options as they become available and to simplify the application and quotation process.

NBN Co has committed to continuing to work with State governments to investigate sources of additional funding to upgrade services for those on fixed wireless or satellite, particularly in areas where the States have identified the potential for economic growth. NBN Co is keen to participate in such projects where additional investment could facilitate faster upgrades for selected areas where practicably feasible, and without impacting NBN Co's existing funding envelope. As part of this increased engagement with state or local governments, NBN Co is open to taking into account other factors that may reduce or offset overall costs, including any expected uplift in revenue or avoided future expenditure expected as a result of the upgrade. These types of upgrades may be considered under the Regional Connectivity Program.

Recommendation 1c

NBN Co has demonstrated its commitment to regional and rural Australia with the launch of NBN local in October 2017. This is a team with 31 members, spread across all states and territories, dedicated to improving the NBN end-user experience for customers in regional and remote Australia.

NBN local includes an extended team of network engineers and deployment specialists located in key regional hubs around the country to work with customer service representatives to help identify and resolve issues in a timely manner.

Since the launch of NBN local, the team has continued to engage regularly with key regional stakeholders such as the Regional and Rural and Remote Communications Coalition, hosted hundreds of community information sessions, briefings and events and developed strategic relationships with state and national groups such as the National Farmers' Federation and the Regional Australian Institute, which are focused on driving digital take-up and literacy for economic and social benefit.

The NBN Co corporate structure is organised on functional lines. Given the regional network involves a mix of technologies NBN Co considers it would not be effective to have an executive whose role cut across the responsibilities of other executives. NBN Co does have an Executive General Manager with direct ownership and accountability for the fixed wireless and satellite products.

Many of the current Board have experience in providing telecommunications and other services to regional Australia. To deepen this expertise when the next series of vacancies on the Board arises the Chairman, in conjunction with government, will consider the appointment of a Board member whose skills include regional, rural and remote Australian expertise who can therefore bring a regional perspective and focus to the Board.

Recommendation 6a

The Government and NBN Co agree-in-principle that consumers should have transparency around the performance of the NBN network and that of the retail service provider.

The Government notes that a number of initiatives are currently underway to address satellite and fixed wireless performance issues that were raised during the committee's public consultations. These initiatives will support an improved consumer experience in regional areas and an increased understanding of where any problems may lie in the network supply chain.

Transparency of NBN fixed wireless performance

Since December 2018, NBN Co has delivered a higher level of transparency with respect to the performance of its fixed wireless network. NBN Co's public dashboard now includes a report on the percentage of fixed wireless cells that fall below the design threshold of 6Mbps monthly busy hour cell performance, and for how long each day these cells are below this threshold.

NBN Co also now provides the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and retail service providers with detailed weekly reports showing:

- which individual cells are performing below the design threshold and when these cells are scheduled to be upgraded
- a forecast of when cells, which are performing above the design threshold, are expected to fall below the threshold, and
- a list of all services belonging to the retail service provider which are connected to the cells performing below the design threshold

These reports enable the retail service providers to respond and provide information to their customers. This extends the monthly information that NBN Co has been providing to retail service providers on congested cells since February 2018. NBN Co is also developing a predictive tool that will enable it to advise retail service providers of areas that could become congested so they can inform customers prior to moving to a fixed wireless service.

NBN Co has set a goal of having less than 1% of fixed wireless towers performing under a 6 megabits per second threshold by September 2019 and is prioritising the upgrading of cells that are not meeting this threshold. NBN Co's latest fixed wireless performance data at the end of 2018 shows 96.6% of NBN's fixed wireless cells have a monthly busy hour cell performance of 6 megabits per second or more.

Transparency of NBN satellite performance

NBN Co has committed to improving the transparency of the Sky Muster satellite network performance and other actions that may improve end-user experience. The Sky Muster service operates with 101 spot beams on each of the two NBN Co satellites, with each beam having its own fixed capacity. NBN Co has put in place a Fair Use Policy and product design to maintain a good level of network performance. Neither the company nor the Government want to see a return of the poor consumer experiences of the highly-congested Interim Satellite Service.

NBN Co will shortly begin publishing satellite network capacities metrics as part of its existing monthly dashboard report. These metrics demonstrate satellite network capacities, which can affect performance for end-users. NBN Co will also report on the number of end-user impacting network incidents, outside of planned maintenance windows, which are recorded and managed in its operating systems.

In addition to system-wide issues there may be local factors impacting the performance in individual services. NBN Co has identified a number of services where poor radio frequency strength between the earth station and the premises could be leading to poor performance. This poor performance will require individual service investigation as it could be the result of an antenna at the premises that has shifted in a storm or other local factors. NBN Co has identified fewer than 300 out of approximately 94,000 premises with a Sky Muster installation which exhibit poor radio frequency strength signals. NBN Co is commencing a pilot program to visit a sample number of these sites to understand the root cause. The pilot is expected to commence in the first half of 2019. NBN Co will report to Government on the outcomes of this pilot program and determine what further action needs to be taken.

Moving forward, the Government will continue to progress initiatives to improve understanding of consumer experience in regional areas. In the short-term, the Department of Communications and the Arts will work with the ACCC and the Australian Communications and Media Authority to explore different monitoring options for satellite and the fixed wireless networks. Given the technical and environmental challenges, this may mean that the approach and associated cost to monitoring fixed wireless and satellite services may be different to the existing Measuring Broadband Australia program. The Government is also conscious of the need to improve information to consumers of things they can do in their own premises to improve their service performance and will prioritise this information to regional consumers.

Recommendation 6b

There is already a range of obligations on retail service providers to provide truth in advertising, including broad prohibitions to engage in misleading and deceptive conduct under the Australian Consumer Law. Additional obligations for retail service providers apply under the Telecommunications (NBN Consumer Information) Industry Standard 2018 which came into effect on 21 September 2018.

The Standard requires all retailers to provide consumers with accurate information to assist them to make an informed choice about services offered using the NBN. Consumers should receive a fact sheet containing speed tier information, advice about factors that impact speed performance and what type of use each plan supports during busy periods. This basic information requirement extends to all NBN services.

The ACCC has proposed to expand its Broadband speed claims: Industry guidance to include information for fixed wireless networks.

This proposed enhancement reflects the ACCC's view that retailers can now access better information about the likely performance of fixed wireless services than was previously the case. Expanding this guidance will provide a higher degree of performance certainty for fixed wireless consumers.

The ACCC is exploring how its industry guidance may include information requirements for satellite services, recognising the technical differences between satellite and other technologies and the impact of environmental factors on satellite service performance.

Recommendation 7

The committee found many Sky Muster customers struggled to stay within their data limits while trying to run their businesses, stay connected with friends and family, and engage with the world online. Since the committee's consultations, NBN Co has announced the new Sky Muster Plus product, due to be launched this year. Sky Muster Plus will not count the use of essential internet services—including email, general web-browsing and common critical smartphone and PC operating system software updates—towards monthly data allowances. This capacity increase is on top of NBN Co doubling Sky Muster wholesale total data limits in 2017 to 300 GB.

This means when a user exhausts their monthly data allowance, wholesale download speeds will not be slowed down for regular web activities like accessing emails, using Government websites or internet banking. Activities such as gaming and video streaming will continue to contribute towards the overall monthly data limit of users and, once the cap is reached, will be speed-shaped down as they are now. However the unmetered essential services can continue to function unshaped. The Government expects this will go a long way in relieving the data pressures on Sky Muster users.

NBN Co will also report back to Government by the end of 2019 about the capacity to make data available to consumer end-users in spot beams where there is additional underutilised capacity, as per recommendation 7.

Modern and appropriate consumer protections— Recommendations 3, 4 and 5

Recommendation 3: The committee recommends no changes to the current Universal Service Obligation arrangements until there are fit-for-purpose alternative voice options for those consumers served by the Sky Muster satellite service.

Recommendation 4: The committee recommends that industry be asked to bring forward new and innovative solutions for providing voice services in rural and remote Australia, particularly for areas served by the High Capacity Radio Concentrator (HCRC) network.

Recommendation 5: The committee recommends that the Government undertake an audit that focuses on:

- a) Repair times for landline services for those living in regional, rural and remote areas that are not fixed within the specified Customer Service Guarantee timeframes.
- b) Measures the impact of Customer Service Guarantee exemptions such as mass disruption events on repair times in regional, rural and remote areas.

Penalties should be considered for excessive repair timeframes.

The Government understands that consumer safeguards are a vital protection for rural and remote businesses and people, particularly as they may have limited or no alternative services available to them.

The Government is driving a significant amount of work to ensure the right consumer safeguards are in place for the modern telecommunications environment. The Government's Consumer Safeguards Review is being undertaken in three parts: A) redress and complaints handling; B) reliability of telecommunications services; and C) choice and fairness in the retail relationship between the customer and their provider.

The review involves detailed stakeholder consultation and is well advanced. On 15 November 2018, the Minister for Communications, Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, released a report with 32 recommendations designed to significantly strengthen consumer safeguards for complaint handling and consumer redress in the telecommunications sector. Minister Fifield also released a consultation paper on the second stage of the review, which will examine ways that consumers and businesses can benefit from improved reliability safeguards for telecommunications services.

Recommendation 3

The Government agrees with the committee's recommendation that no changes to the current Universal Service Obligation (USO) arrangements be made until there are fit-for-purpose alternative voice options for those consumers served by the Sky Muster satellite service. This is consistent with current Government policy as announced on 5 December 2018, and will remain the case.

The Government will implement two new measures to support the development of the Universal Service Guarantee (USG), ensuring it will service all Australians in the long term. These measures include expert advice on the further development of the USG, and additional work on technologies that can be used to deliver the USO in the future. These measures will strengthen the already significant investment by the Government to ensure all Australians will have reasonable access and equitable provision of standard telephone and payphone services.

Recommendation 4

The Government agrees with the committee's recommendation that there is a need to test alternate solutions for providing voice services to rural and remote Australia, particularly for areas served by the High Capacity Radio Concentrator (HCRC) network. The HCRC network is ageing and there is little information available about what alternative services have been planned to ensure essential landline services continue to be available in the event that the HCRC network fails. The Government will call for expressions of interest from the telecommunications industry in the second quarter of 2019 to bring forward new and innovative solutions for those living in rural and remote Australia.

Recommendation 5

The Government agrees-in-principle that there should be a greater focus on landline reliability in regional, rural and remote areas. In response to the review, Telstra has committed to an additional suite of measures to improve its regional network. Telstra will invest in repairing and replacing aspects of its landline network to reduce faults and improve reliability. Telstra will also begin migrating some customers off parts of the HCRC network to newer and more reliable technology. The Government will monitor the progress of these additional measures and reserves the right to conduct an audit of landline repair timeframes if they do not result in improved customer experience.

Additionally, the Department of Communications and the Arts is currently undertaking an audit focusing on Telstra's compliance with its Copper Continuity Obligation and Customer Service Guarantee performance. This audit is being conducted as part of its normal contract management processes as part of the Telstra Universal Service Obligation Performance Agreement.

Digital inclusion—Recommendations 8, 9 and 10

Recommendation 8: A targeted Indigenous Digital Inclusion program with a focus on access, affordability and digital ability be developed in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 9: Governments and industry should reduce barriers to people engaging with essential services online, including unmetering data for access to government sites.

Recommendation 10: The Government commit to improving digital literacy in regional, rural and remote Australia by:

- a) Developing an online technology ‘hub’ to provide independent and factual information to help support people to build up the skills to solve telecommunications issues.
- b) Deploying technical advisers on a short-term basis across regional, rural and remote Australia to provide on-the-ground support to help people get connected and stay connected, using technologies that are suitable to their individual needs.
- c) Encouraging the agriculture sector to provide industry-specific advice about the Internet of Things and other digital applications that will drive productivity gains in the sector.

The Government understands that access to infrastructure is only part of the solution, and is working to ensure people have the right skills, reliable information and consumer protections required to confidently and safely participate in the modern world.

Recommendation 8

The Government agrees-in-principle with this recommendation. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, will provide lead policy advice, with support from the Department of Communications and the Arts to develop an Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan. The Government will work through existing Indigenous consultative mechanisms such as the Indigenous Advisory Council to identify community priorities and ensure a tailored response.

The Government’s Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan will consider Government investments to date to improve Indigenous digital inclusion and identify community priorities for further work (recommendation 8). A one-size-fits-all approach is not always appropriate, and specific action needs to be tailored to community needs.

Recommendation 9

The Government agrees-in-principle with the committee’s recommendation 9, and is committed to reducing barriers to people actively engaging and receiving the benefits of using essential services online.

The Government’s Digital Transformation Strategy will drive forward how government’s services are designed to deliver better outcomes for people and businesses. It will focus on three areas.

Engagement and service delivery—to make government interactions and engagement easier for citizens and businesses.

Decision-making—to make smarter and more innovative decisions through the use of data and analytics.

Supporting structures and business models—to make government fit for the challenges of the digital age by adopting new and emerging technologies and challenging the mindset and processes.

The strategy will be accompanied by a roadmap, which will set out milestones, including when they will be reached, across all areas of focus.

The unmetering of data for general web-browsing, including use of Government sites, through Sky Muster Plus will go some way in alleviating data pressures for its customers. Further work is needed to determine which consumer groups would most benefit most from unmetering access to Government sites and how this might best be achieved (including through access to public broadband services such as are available in libraries).

Recommendation 10a and 10b

A digital tech hub (recommendation 10a) would provide independent and factual information about the choices of digital technologies and applications. The telecommunications market place and technology are changing and have become much more complicated. There is confusion and concerns among regional consumers, much of which flows from a lack of knowledge about the responsibilities of each player in the supply chain and the most appropriate solutions to meet their needs and keep their services operating. The Government agrees to progress this measure as part of the Regional Connectivity Program.

The Government will further consider the need for ‘on the ground’ technical advisers, as per recommendation 10b, after the technology hub has been established and is operational.

Recommendation 10c

The Government agrees with the committee’s recommendation 10c and is already working with the agricultural sector to provide industry-specific advice about Internet of Things and other digital applications that will drive productivity gains in the sector.

Given the importance of telecommunications to agricultural innovation and to future proof development the Government will work with key stakeholders such as the agricultural Research and Development Corporations and the National Farmers’ Federation in the pursuit of increased profitability from the adoption of agricultural technology and digital agriculture solutions. The Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources has asked the agricultural Research and Development Corporations and the National Farmers’ Federation to further their work on these important issues.